

THE DEMOCRATS

"Your Record Is Not Reassuring"

In an open letter, a former Secretary of Defense questions Dukakis' grasp of national security



James Schlesinger has dealt with national security for every President since Dwight Eisenhower. He was CIA director and Secretary of Defense in the Nixon and Ford Administrations, then Energy Secretary for Jimmy Carter.

DEAR GOVERNOR DUKAKIS:

While congratulating you on your nomination, many of us who have worked for the nation's security in Democratic and Republican Administrations feel trepidation about your views—and, more important, your instincts—on crucial defense issues. All that we have to go on are your actions as Governor and your statements in the campaign.

As chief executive of Massachusetts, you have had an opportunity to affect the national-security policy of the country as a whole, and your record is not reassuring. You have steadily prevented Massachusetts' participation in the Ground Wave Emergency Network, a communications system designed to transmit warnings or presidential orders to the Strategic Air Command and the North American Aerospace Defense Command if the nation were under nuclear attack. Of 56 intended GWEN sites around the country, 52 have now been completed. Only your state and Rhode Island continue as holdouts. This Massachusetts gap in the national-warning system is particularly disquieting since the primary radar installation for detecting a submarine-launched missile attack is located on Cape Cod.

In your 1986 letter to the Air Force objecting to the placement of GWEN in Massachusetts, you suggested that having such a communications system might encourage the "mistaken belief that nuclear war can be kept under control once it begins" and thereby "make national leaders more inclined to let one begin." Governor, what deters war is the completeness and integrity of the U.S. deterrent, and secure communications enhance our deterrent. Yet you seem to suggest that the way to deter war is to be unprepared to respond.

In a matter less consequential but perhaps equally indicative, in your ten years as Governor you have declined all invitations to visit Hanscom Air Force Base, the premier military facility in Massachusetts and the home of the Air Force's Electronic Systems Division. Four ESD commanders have invited you. Accepting such invitations is the normal political practice, and other Massachusetts officials have regularly done so. Your unwillingness to visit Hanscom has led many of us to wonder whether you are viscerally antimilitary.

Your campaign statements to date have done little to dissipate such concerns. You have explicitly opposed America's latest intercontinental ballistic missile, the MX; plans for a small, single-warhead mobile ICBM, the Midgetman; the B-1 and Stealth bombers. You have also urged a ban on all missile test flights. You have indicated that you would terminate or radically reduce the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI).

To be sure, you have strongly supported efforts to achieve

further arms-control agreements. Nonetheless, for us unilaterally to curtail our strategic programs, as you have suggested, would remove much of the Soviet Union's military incentive for compromise and thus destroy much of America's leverage in negotiations. In recent months, as you have moved toward the political center, you have acknowledged the continued necessity for nuclear deterrence and have indicated that, despite your opposition to the MX and Midgetman, you are not necessarily against a new ICBM in principle. Yet you will find that any new missile program is impossible unless you back off from your commitment to a missile test-flight ban. We cannot have a new missile system unless we test it.

You have expressed support for NATO and called for a "conventional defense initiative." This exhortation, which so far is largely lacking in content, seems intended to constitute your substitute for SDI and other new strategic programs. Those of us who have long advocated an improved conventional capability are eager to join in any serious effort to that end. But you seem not to have faced up to the intractable reality that improvement in the conventional balance is both difficult and costly.

Quite simply, nuclear weapons and nuclear strategy hold NATO together. Our European allies will view with alarm any statement that seems to weaken the nuclear element of the deterrent. They will be especially disturbed by any repetition of your remarks to the Atlantic Council on June 14 that NATO must be up "to the challenge of fighting—and winning" a conventional war. The Europeans are interested not in fighting but in deterring a war. They would not want as an American President anyone who believes that conventional war is somehow fightable and winnable—therefore acceptable.

Moreover, you will find that over the past decade or so, the Soviet Union has enormously improved the number and quality of its conventional forces. The Warsaw Pact has particularly improved its capability for short-warning attack. Therefore we have a dauntingly long way to go in restoring the conventional balance. Yet we and our key allies are under immense budgetary and other pressures to shrink NATO's forces. So while strengthening NATO's conventional capability is desirable, it will require careful handling of our allies and additional resources. In estimating the price tag for these conventional improvements at \$3 billion over four or five years, as you did in an interview with the *Baltimore Sun* published on July 3, you have trivialized the problem. A more realistic estimate would be tens of billions of dollars a year. Strengthening NATO's ability to deter war should not be simply an afterthought for a politician who may have painted himself into a corner by opposing strategic nuclear programs; a true conventional defense initiative will require additional expenditures roughly on the order of the Strategic Defense Initiative itself. As you seek to become the leader of the free world and our Commander in Chief, many of us hope that you will acquire a better feel for these complexities.

JAMES SCHLESINGER

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